

# LEARNING STYLES AND TRAINING PRINCIPLES

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## I. Introduction

There are a lot of valid thoughts and talk these days about appropriate training methods. This is a need expatriate trainers have been aware of. However, there seems to be a major misconception in trying to adapt teaching styles to fit the learning styles of students and trainees. This is an extremely basic and important principle! As expatriate guests in other's countries, we must be sensitive to help our hosts. However, it is my strong conviction that as we should strive very hard to adapt to our hosts' way of doing (language, culture, methods), rather than requiring them to do our ways. Specifically, our teaching/training techniques should be congruent with the cultural style of learning with which they are comfortable and accustomed to following. With that as a premise, I trust this article will give further thoughts into the differences in learning styles, as well as provide some ideas on how to make training methods more culturally appropriate and accommodating to our hosts.

## II. Global - Linear Model

Following is a binary model on learning styles which has been simplified from a presentation by Gloria Kindell given at an SIL. in-service in Dallas, Texas, Spring of 1989.

## GLOBAL (HOLISTIC)      LINEAR (ANALYTICAL)

### Learning Style

simultaneous perception & processing intuitive holistic/synthetic big picture → details	sequential perception & processing cognitive analytical details → big picture (figure it out myself) verbal (read, listen...) explain/lecture and do passive participation 'just tell me how' theory is OK hypothetical examples OK individualistic/independ. 'I'll do it myself, thanks' facts/objective abstract boundaries/few more precise attentive to details
Learning Atmosphere	
easy/warm/relaxed informal desks in circle people oriented fun! enjoyment! popcorn and koolaid time nonexistent	functional/scrious formal desks in a row work oriented production! pencils and books time pressured

### Teacher

part of the gang  
guide/model/facilitator

authority figure  
leader

### Lessons

contemplative worded      intense brief and factual

purpose/why analogies/comparisons appreciated (it's like) event/project oriented need to finish/closure! needs assimilation time less competitive team work: help and be helped	focus on lesson content describe logically efficiency/hour oriented time conscious ready to apply now more competitive independent
appreciates teacher guidance skills discussion/dialogue dramatization symbolism/parables object lessons illustrations singing humor, fun	irritated with too much help theoretical principles lecture/rote very economic in: time teachers information money

As you have probably realized, most people are neither totally global nor extremely linear. The majority of people are a combination from both sides, or somewhere on a global-linear continuum. Every combination has strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, it is not a matter of one certain learning style being right or good, while another is wrong or bad. Learning styles simply *are*. The important thing is that the teacher or trainer makes his teaching style fit the learning style of the students or trainees. That is, if maximum learning, coupled with maximum motivation, is the goal.

### III. The Problem

Based on observation, studies (see papers by D'Jermes, Sanders, Schoelling), and personal evaluations by PNG nationals themselves, it is quite obvious that the majority of Malaysians tend very much toward having global learning styles. Traditionally, their learning has occurred via wholistic, hands-on, observe and do, informal, event oriented, group dependent methods. They prefer and are comfortable with a more global teaching style.

Herein lies the problem. Most school education is done in a very Western/linear way. Those who have made it through this formal, more theoretically based system, have either been comfortable with a linear teaching style, or they have been able to adapt sufficiently enough to learn by it. Consequently, since a linear or analytical style

of teaching is what was used to teach us (by and large), when we teach, we automatically revert to the model we learned under. Unfortunately though, not everyone is capable of adjusting to the degree it takes to learn from a teaching method based primarily on the lecture and reading modes of imparting information and skills. And many global learners who try, end up only frustrated and defeated in the attempt. Unintentionally, otherwise very intelligent and creative trainees have often become demotivated simply because a teaching style congruous with their cultural upbringing and experience has not been used.

### IV. Suggested Training Principles

Although it has been said before in different ways, the following are a few suggested training methods which could be employed in writers' workshops, teacher training courses, or any type of training course:

1. Let lectures and note taking (passive learning) take a very minimal amount of time. Color-coded charts and notes can be prepared and given as handouts at appropriate times. If it is absolutely necessary to use monologue/lecture as a teaching device, strive to make it as colorful and hearable as possible with many illustrations, examples, comparisons, word pictures, and/or questions to keep the audience actively thinking and involved. [*Rule of thumb*: have at least one comparison, analogy, skit, or example to illustrate every point made in a presentation.]
2. Demonstrations, observation, drama, skits, imitations, singing, media audiovisuals, discussion, games, question-answer, dialogue, hands-on practice and other like means of active participation, should be used as the major medium of communicating new knowledge and concepts (rather than monologic lectures).
3. Start the training with a look (via demonstration, a media presentation, visiting an actual school, or handling a book, etc.) at what is the desired *finished* product. In other words, give the big picture or the big idea in physical form. Trying to explain with words is inadequate here for global learners.
4. Proceed in training by breaking the big picture down into workable chunks, but always present each chunk in the context of the whole. (Keep the big picture in mind.)

5. When the smaller chunks have been learned, gradually practise piecing them back together to formulate the whole again.
6. In teacher training courses, it is best to work with actual materials and children or adult students. Real materials and situations are much better than hypothetical situations whenever possible.
7. Provide adequate time for questions and clearing up fuzzy thinking. This is an aspect that is often rushed by expatriate trainers. If no questions come up from the trainees after a presentation, maybe they are so confused they aren't sure what questions to ask.
8. There should be a form of closure for the larger chunks (i.e., feast, graduation, etc.) as well as the smaller units of content or skill (i.e., progress charts which can be checked off), and periodic time for organizing and revising is helpful to trainees.
9. Strive to keep a relaxed, open and light (humorous) atmosphere throughout the training process. It is a known fact that laughter enhances learning capabilities. Let the endorphins flow...

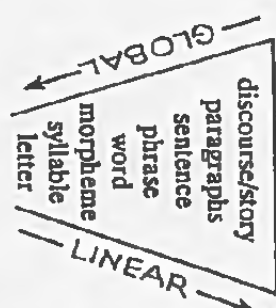
Also, keep in mind that shorter (two to three weeks) training courses which occur more often will have better long term results than longer, information packed workshops. Let's not be guilty of giving information overload resulting in burnt-out trainees (not to mention trainers!). *Revision* and *follow-up* are key elements in successful training. I firmly believe that the extra time, energy and creativity required to train globally will come back to us in multiple dimensions if we will commit ourselves to quality training appropriate to the trainees' preferred learning styles. As Arden Sanders indicates in his dissertation, it takes *a lot more work* to prepare a global teaching presentation than it does to prepare a lecture. Remember that. Prepare for it.

#### V. Multistrategy Method (MSM) on Target

Based on the global - linear model, it is easy to see why the MSM and other similar methods of teaching literacy are so successful: they accommodate both global and linear learners.

The MSM teaches literacy via two main approaches: (1) Story track, and (2) Workbook or primer track. The Story track accommodates wholistic learners—working from the top of the hierarchy down to words, while the workbook or primer approach can

accommodate linear learners—working from letters up the hierarchy toward the story level.



Literacy methods incorporating both global and linear approaches not only allow for learning to take place within one's own preferred learning style, but they also encourage development in other aspects of learning.

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